



Executive Summary 2020-2021 Evaluation Report

Overview

The Northwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety (NWCOHS) is a National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health-funded Education and Research Center (ERC). NWCOHS is housed in the University of Washington (UW) Department of Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences (DEOHS) and brings together faculty from the UW Schools of Public Health, Nursing and Medicine. NWCOHS is committed to ensuring high quality training, education, and outreach to prepare current and future generations of occupational health and safety professionals for the workforce.

This Executive Summary provides highlights from a 55-page evaluation report that highlights NWCOHS accomplishments and identifies areas for improvement during Year 1 of our current competing renewal cycle (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021). Year 1 of our new evaluation program focused on our in-residence graduate programs. Additional evaluation of our Continuing Education (CE), Outreach, Professional Training Opportunities Program (PTOP), and Work and Health Graduate Certificate programs will be phased into future annual evaluations.

Our evaluation, which will be conducted annually, is guided by our [strategic plan](#) and logic model. The annual evaluation seeks to address four overarching questions:

1. How is NWCOHS increasing awareness about occupational health and safety in Region X among practitioners, community stakeholders, underserved and underrepresented communities, and academia?
2. How does NWCOHS research contribute to the knowledge of Northwest worker safety and well-being?
3. How is NWCOHS preparing trainees and CE professionals to address regional occupational health & safety (OHS) needs?
4. What are the impacts of NWCOHS activities on Northwest OHS?

Data Collection

We leveraged a mixed method approach to answer each of our evaluation questions, collecting and synthesizing information from program directors, trainees, and external stakeholders, as well as secondary sources. Specifically, these included: program director annual reporting forms, trainee feedback via annual surveys and a focus group, trainee activity summaries, 6 one-on-one stakeholder interviews, enrollment reports, the ERC's annual Research Performance Progress Report, social media analytics, and web analytics.



Findings and Discussion

We synthesized findings across data sources to address the evaluation questions. We present them below. Due to the interconnected nature of the ERC's goals and activities, some findings addressed multiple questions.

1) How is NWCOS increasing awareness about occupational health and safety in Region X among practitioners, community stakeholders, underserved and underrepresented communities, and academia?

New OHS tools for workplaces

NWCOHS faculty from the Continuing Education (CE) and Occupational Health at the Human-Animal Interface (OHAI) programs, together with animal health and medicine experts, designed a [new self-study course](#) on infection prevention and control (IPC) on animal farms.

Despite COVID-19 challenges, the NWCOHS increased awareness of OHS research and training through 29 accepted publications and 35 presentations authored or co-authored by program directors, faculty, and students, 67 media engagements (radio, digital, paper) and 87 social media posts, as well as 39 consultations with organizations, government agencies, and policymakers. The NWCOHS website received 11,757 unique pageviews and [NWCOHS blog](#) shared 11 stories that cover OHS activities among our students, faculty, and community partners.

Program directors shared recruitment activities for potential trainees/students, including direct outreach, social media advertisements, and conference/workshop appearances.

Trainees reported 25 conference presentations, guest lectures, and other speaking opportunities, 21 manuscripts in progress, submitted, or published, and five written outputs in the form of blog posts and op-eds. Finally, stakeholders highlighted the benefits of CE modules for increasing knowledge and awareness of OHS throughout the PNW region and Washington State, specifically.



2) How does our research contribute to the regional knowledge of worker safety and well-being?

We synthesized information based on the number of publications and presentations shared by program directors and trainees as well as stakeholder feedback regarding their knowledge and impressions of research coming out of the NWCOHS. Stakeholders shared that they recognize that Center research is impactful and report positive impressions of the Center overall, but have less familiarity with the specific research produced by NWCOHS.

Mitigating the effects of wildlife smoke on occupational health

Wildfires and associated extreme smoke events are increasingly impacting Northwest communities. To improve worker health and safety when the smoke rolls in, NWCOHS faculty and students evaluated training programs designed to improve N95 mask effectiveness in community settings, evaluated the impacts of HEPA portable air cleaners on indoor wildfire smoke exposure, and explored potential impacts of [wildlife smoke exposure among Washington State construction workers](#).

3) How has NWCOHS prepared trainees and CE professionals to address regional OHS needs?

"NWCOHS has a large network of outreach trainers and excellent training resources...NWCOHS offers the best safety and health classes I've received. NWCOHS is very effective in providing me with training."
- CE course participant

The ERC supported 25 master's and PhD trainees during the 2020-21 academic year: Trainees receive training and education through various mechanisms that aid in their preparation for the OHS workforce, including internships, coursework, and faculty mentorship. Overall, trainees reported quite favorable and satisfactory experiences during their time in the ERC, noting the value of mentorship, specifically, and various course offerings. Notably, all 14 trainee survey respondents shared that they strongly agreed or agreed that they would advise people interested in OHS to

apply to the University of Washington. CE activities pushed forward throughout the pandemic, offering 69 courses and reaching a total of 1,650 participants to address regional OHS needs.



4) What are the impacts of NWCOS activities on Northwest OHS?

Impacts of NWCOS activities on Northwest OHS were more difficult to capture given that this was the first year in which we conducted comprehensive, ERC-wide evaluation data collection activities and that measurement of impacts takes time. Our evaluation plan calls for a longitudinal approach using consistent, annual data collection activities, to assess such impacts. However, we were able to glean preliminary, perceived impacts from NWCOS activities based primarily on findings from stakeholder interviews, which highlighted the notable regional presence and leadership of NWCOS when it comes to OHS training and education and positive impressions of NWCOS research.

Contributing to new regulations

NWCOS faculty provided input to the emergency heat rulemaking process in Oregon and Washington, resulting in new [emergency heat regulations](#).

Recommendations

During the August 2021 evaluation retreat, program directors and staff reflected on the detailed recommendations provided by trainees, stakeholders, and the evaluation team. Following this retreat, the evaluation team consolidated the initial recommendations into feasible and actionable overarching recommendations provided below.

Continue to engage in local and regional activities that identify and support the needs of stakeholders. Specifically, consider co-hosting events with other OHS groups, ensure that needs assessments conducted at the program level are communicated to other programs and Center leadership in order to align assessment efforts, and provide additional opportunities for interactions between trainees and local OHS professionals.

Continue to provide and expand opportunities for trainees to interact with practitioners, faculty members, and fellow trainees. Increase the amount of unstructured time for peer-to-peer interactions and mentorship; encourage faculty attendance at ERC interdisciplinary events to allow for informal interaction with trainees; and consider ways to integrate OHS professionals into interdisciplinary events.

Critically appraise ERC programming to reduce redundancies and trainee burden. Review programming against other School and program-level requirements to reduce redundancy where possible and strive for anti-racism events and trainings that are organized and held in an inclusive manner that fosters safe spaces for discussion.



Increase awareness of ERC structure and activities to trainees and stakeholders.

Develop and frequently use standardized communication materials about ERC structure and function that can be integrated into presentations, reports and other communications; clarify expectations for program and Center-wide recruitment activities and coordinate how to track efforts; ensure that CE activities are integrated into future evaluation reports; and identify additional opportunities to capture and communicate the ways that program faculty and trainees are engaging with local and regional stakeholders.

Continue to prioritize Anti-Racism and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in all Center activities. Broaden engagement with URM-serving institutions and non-research oriented educational institutions, including through intentional recruitment activities, PTOP, outreach, and identifying opportunities for faculty engagement and training; identify additional avenues for anti-racism work through Center activities; and ensure diverse stakeholder input is included in needs assessments (e.g., Tribal perspectives), specifically for the annual CE needs assessment and the ERC Year 4 needs assessment for the competing renewal.

Contact Info

Evaluation report prepared by: Jamie Vickery, PhD, Lindsay Pysson, MPA, and Nicole A. Errett, PhD, MSPH

Northwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety
nwcohs@uw.edu
<https://deohs.washington.edu/nwcohs/>